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ABSTRACT

Caregivers and professional staff (N=223) in two institutions for severely mentally retarded individuals of all ages were administered the Critical Behavioral Incidents Questionnaire. They rated 44 common misbehaviors that occur in institutional settings in the following areas: (1) how often the misbehavior occurred; (2) perceived seriousness by respondent; (3) perceived seriousness by the institution; (4) how severely the misbehavior should be punished. Punishment was defined in broad, generic terms as acts or omissions which the caregiver considers must be used to control misbehaviors. A demographic information questionnaire was also administered, based on research which related certain demographic variables to attitudes toward the use of physical force in institutional settings, as well as research on modeling theory. The punishment score was used as the criterion variable and the demographic information as predictor variables in a stepwise multiple regression. Results suggested that the individual's experience with punishment as a child, specifically the frequency of punishment experienced within the home, influenced attitudes toward its use in adulthood. Effects of modeling were considered to be a useful framework for understanding punitive attitudes of caregivers and professionals in institutional settings. (Seventeen references and four tables are provided.) (JW)

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Institutional Caregivers' Attitudes Toward Severity of Punishment

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Institutional Caregivers' Attitudes Toward Severity of Punishment

Various figures indicate that between 150,000 and 250,000 persons currently live in institutional facilities. Research suggests that a significant number of children in these institutions are demonstrably vulnerable to maltreatment (Rindfleisch & Rabb, 1984). The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1979) has recognized that this maltreatment often occurs as overly punitive punishment and may meet the criteria for child abuse. In fact, it is suggested that abusive punishment techniques are actually sanctioned by some institutions (Children's Defense Fund, 1978).

Reasons for the use of severe punishment procedures on the part of the staff may be the result of many factors. Certainly there are a number of sadistic and overly authoritarian child care workers attracted to such a position (Rindfleisch, 1984). As well, there may be a number of people who do not understand the effects of punishment because it was a part of their own lives and/or they were never exposed to alternate techniques.

A number of previous investigations suggest that the best predictor of punitiveness may be the punisher's own past history (Lennox, 1982; Sofer, 1983). That is, modeling, as described by Bandura (1973) may be the mediator which occurs between parent and child and

future parent. Therefore, while a number of possibly significant demographic and ecological variables can be explored, it is expected that the caregiver's own experience as a child may best predict current attitudes. Owens and Strauss (1973), Fairchild and Erwin (1977), and Lennox (1982) found in their research that a modeling effect could account for the practice of corporal punishment in certain settings. Welsh (1979) and Valusek (1981) concluded from their studies that practices of child-rearing were continued even though felt to be inappropriate by the parent figure.

For the purposes of this study, a generic definition of punishment is used. Punishment is considered as acts/omissions which the caregiver thinks must be used to control certain misbehaviors. No specific punishment is defined, instead, severity of punishment is defined on a five point scale ranging from no punishment to very severe punishment. In construction of the scale used in the study, respondents indicated an understanding of the interval system used (no punishment, mild, moderate, severe, very severe). In addition, other studies (Kreutter, 1982); Farley, 1983) have found that adults tend to think of talking to children and reprimanding as the least severe form of punishment with the infliction of pain as most severe.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors which affected caregivers' attitudes toward the severity of punishment due for certain misbehaviors. Effort was made to determine 1) the single factor or combination of factors that were most influential in explaining the occurrence of potentially abusive forms of punishment and 2) the difference in the way in which institutional staff judged the seriousness of certain misbehaviors and the punishment due, and the way in which they felt the institution viewed that misbehavior.

A review of the research on discipline and punishment indicates that harsh discipline/abuse probably results from a combination of circumstances (institutional and/or administrative variables, interpersonal factors, etc.), modeling, and personality types (Rindfleisch, 1977, 1984; Haddock & McQueen, 1983). The literature also suggests characteristics of children/residents which influences the punishment they are likely to receive (Zigler, 1980; National Center on Child Abuse & Neglect, 1983). Alternate forms of discipline are found to be at least as effective as punishment but are used less frequently (Rose, 1981).

Method

Subjects

The staff in two institutions for mentally retarded residents were participants in this research. There were 223 participants; the characteristics of the sample

are listed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The population served by the subjects were residents of all ages at two institutions. The levels of retardation range from severe to profound.

Instrument

The Critical Behavioral Incidents Questionnaire (CBIQ) consists of 44 common misbehaviors that occur in institutional settings. The scale was constructed by gathering items which were identified as common misbehaviors by a wide variety of direct caregivers and professionals employed in several institutions. The items for the scale appear in Figure 1. The respondents rated each misbehavior on four scales: 1) how often the respondent felt the misbehavior occurred (never, seldom, occasionally, frequently, constantly); 2) the seriousness of the misbehavior as they perceived it and 3) the seriousness as they felt the institution perceived it (not serious, somewhat serious, moderately serious, quite serious, extremely serious); and 4) how severely they felt the particular misbehavior should be punished (no punishment, mild punishment, moderate punishment, severe punishment, and very severe punishment).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Content and construct validity was assured through consultation and input from experts in the area during the construction of the instrument. A pilot study using the instrument with 100 child care workers was performed. Participants were requested to rate the items and offer suggestions for clarity and comprehension. Face validity was insured.

Test retest reliability was performed by administering the same questionnaire to a group of 25 participants after one month. Test retest correlations for the scales were: .58 for Occurrence; .98 for Staff Seriousness; .79 for Institution Seriousness; and .98 for Severity of Punishment.

A Demographic Information Questionnaire was administered along with the CBIQ. This Questionnaire was based on research which related certain demographic variables to attitudes toward the use of physical force in institutional settings (Rindfleisch, 1977, 1984), and also research on modeling theory (Straus, 1983).

Procedure

The CBIQ and Demographic Information Questionnaire were distributed after staff meetings to 223 caregivers and professional staff at two institutions for mentally retarded residents. Respondents were assured of

anonymity and informed that they would receive the results of the study.

Results

The dependent variable in this study was the sum of scores for the 44 misbehaviors on the "how severely do you think the misbehavior should be punished" scale. The independent variables were all of the demographic information and the three remaining scales of the CBIQ (Occurrence, Staff Seriousness, Institution Seriousness). The punishment score was used as the criterion variable with the demographic information used as predictor variables in a stepwise multiple regression. The results appear in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Important nominal information was included in the Questionnaire. Liberal interpretation was necessary in order to transform the data so that it could be included in the regression equation. Therefore, religion, religious denomination, church attendance, and community in which the participant was raised were assigned nominal values.

With all demographic variables included and the severity of punishment score as the criterion variable, several factors add significantly to the regression

equation. Together, they account for 70% of the variance of the criterion variable. The frequency of punishment within the home is the single best predictor, followed by severity of punishment at home.

The nominal data were also analyzed with an ANOVA design. Table 3 presents these data as a comparison of the punishment scores for the various groups. Significant difference at p .05 was found between: Black and Caucasian race; Protestant, Catholic, and no religion; the Baptist denomination; and Fundamentalist religious consideration.

Insert Table 3 about here

In order to determine the institutional factors that determine respondents' attitudes toward the severity of punishment, the severity score was correlated with the other scales on the CBIQ (occurrence, staff seriousness, and perceived institution seriousness) for each of the 44 misbehaviors. These data are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

These data demonstrate quite clearly that the severity of punishment for specific misbehaviors is significantly more related to the seriousness as

perceived by the staff than by either the frequency of the occurrence of it or the perceived seriousness with which it is viewed by the institution. That is, the staff rates the severity of the misbehaviors in a manner much like the way in which they rate the severity of the punishment that the misbehaviors deserve.

In the course of analyzing the data, it was recognized that the attitudes were influenced by the nature of the misbehavior. The actual analysis is too lengthy to be presented here, however, a summary is provided. A principal component factor analysis with equimax rotation was performed on the severity of punishment scale for the set of misbehaviors. Six factors were identified, and each factor was used as the dependent variable in a stepwise multiple regression with demographic variables as predictors. The frequency of punishment at home during childhood was the best predictor in four of the six analyses. Severity of punishment at home and frequency of punishment in school were the best predictors in the remaining two.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that one's experience with punishment as a child, specifically the frequency of punishment experienced within the home, influence the attitude toward its use in adulthood. It offers strong evidence to support modeling as a paradigm

to understand punitive attitudes of child care providers and professionals in institutional settings. It is clear that child-rearing practices experienced during one's own childhood carry into the next generation of child-rearing. While the sample represents only two institutions, the results are reinforced by other studies performed in homes (Straus, 1983), schools (Lennox, 1982), and psychologists (Sofer, 1983).

This study investigates certain sensitive demographic factors that are not usually studied. According to the present study, a potentially punitive caregiver is described as: minority race, attends Church less frequently, raised in less urban areas, lower SES in childhood and at present, possibly Baptist and/or Fundamentalist in religious persuasion, and had greater experience with frequency and severity of punishment at home, school, and in other places.

In conclusion, this study has implications for training of child care staff. Trainers and staff need to be sensitive to the modeling effect. Specifically, caregivers need to cognitively and emotionally accept the basis of their punitiveness. If the more punitive caregivers are able to objectively view the reasons for engaging in harsh discipline, they may be more amenable to change.

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Table 1

Description of the Sample

Variable		N	%
Age:	45+	40	18
	35-44	30	14
	25-34	77	35
	21-24	40	18
	below 20	36	16
Gender:	Male	56	25
	Female	167	75
Race:	Caucasian	136	61
	Black	76	35
	Hispanic	11	5
Community raised within:	Urban	27	12
	Suburban	101	45
	Rural	95	43

SES of childhood:	Lower	33	15
	Low middle	83	37
	Middle	90	40
	Upper middle	14	6
	Upper	3	1
Current SES:	Lower	14	6
	Low middle	101	45
	Middle	103	46
	Upper middle	5	2
Family-type during childhood:	Natural	162	73
	Foster	12	5
	Blended	49	22
Religion:	Protestant	119	53
	Catholic	70	31
	Jewish	10	5
	none	18	8
	other	6	6
Denomination:	Jehovah Witness	17	8
	Methodist	25	11
	Lutheran	16	7
	Baptist	21	9
	Presbyterian	20	9
	Other	26	12
	not applicable	98	44
Church Attendance:	1x/week	42	19
	2x/month	28	13
	1x/month	29	13
	Holy Days	37	17
	rarely	69	31
	not applicable	18	8
Religious Consideration:	Liberal	90	40
	Moderate	75	34
	Conservative	14	6
	Fundamentalist	6	3
	Evangelical	20	9
	not applicable	18	8
Population working with:	Young adult	2	1
	Adult	17	8
	Mixed	204	92
Type of Retardation working with:	Severe	6	3
	Profound	21	9
	Mixed	196	88
Educational degree:	Some HS	31	14
	HS or GED	119	53

	Some college	67	30
	College	1	1
	Graduate	4	2
Years at this work setting:	less than 1	31	14
	1-5	88	40
	6-10	68	31
	11-15	28	13
	15+	8	4
Position:	Caregiver	196	88
	Paraprofessional	11	5
	Professional	14	6
Job satisfaction:	Satisfied	85	38
	Sometime satisfied	104	47
	Not satisfied	34	15
Frequency of punishment at home:	not at all	17	8
	several x/yr.	97	44
	1x/month	29	13
	1x/week	58	26
	1x/week +	22	10
Severity of punishment at home:	never punished	17	8
	mild	104	47
	moderate	54	24
	severe	48	22
Frequency of punishment at school:	not at all	62	28
	several x/yr.	85	38
	1x/month	57	26
	1x/week	19	9
Severity of punishment at school:	never punished	62	28
	mild	65	29
	moderate	94	42
	severe	2	1
Other places punished:	none	171	77
	one	52	23

Figure 1

Misbehaviors Listed on the

Critical Behavioral Incidents Questionnaire

Wetting during day
Wetting at night
Litter on grounds
Leaving program
Loitering - restrooms
Not attending programs
Leaving building
Sexual approaches
Homosexual acts
Petting
Smoking
Group fights
Weapons
Disobeying
Disrespect - employee
Tantrums
Indecent language
Disruption - programs
Self-injury
Masturbation
Losing clothing
Extortion
Tardiness to programs
Inappropriate dressing
Defacing property
Throwing in building
Throwing in rooms
Disturbance - vehicles
Leaving grounds
Stealing
Fighting
Attacking employees
Attacking residents
Drugs
Body odors
Disrespect - caregivers
Rudeness - residents
Excessive Noise
Dishonesty
Not participating
Not completing projects
Refusing to speak
Litter on floor
Gambling

Table 2

Summary Table for Stepwise Multiple Regression with $\bar{X}$ Punishment Score as the Criterion Variable

Variable	Multiple R	R^2	% Var	beta
Freq of punishment - home	.65243	.42566	43	.15113
Severity of punishment - home	.69379	.48135	6	.34173
Work population	.75296	.56696	3	-.11463
Job satisfaction	.76900	.59136	2	.12610
Gender	.79147	.62642	2	.15947
Other places punished	.80230	.64368	2	.17851
Freq of punishment - school	.81366	.66204	2	.21450
Type retardation	.82474	.68020	1	-.15155
Education	.83564	.69829	1	.11344

Table 3

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for

Demographic Variables with $\bar{X}$ Punishment Score

& Newman-Keuls Test for Group Significance

Variable	Group	N	Mean* Pun Scr	SNK*** prob	SD	F ratio & prob
Race	White	136	98.12	.05	.59	25.46**
	Black	76	150.20			
Community	Urban	27	97.67		.69	12.15**
	Suburb	101	98.62			
	Rural	95	124.04	.05		
Religion	Prot.	119	110.87	.05	1.04	13.95**
	Catholic	70	99.04	.05		
	Jewish	10	70.30			
	No rel.	18	153.44	.05		
Denom-ination	Method.	25	84.96		2.21	13.38**
	Luther.	16	100.81			
	Baptist	21	144.86	.05		
	Presby.	20	100.05			

Variable	Group	N	Mean Pun Sc	SNK* prob	SD	F ratio & prob
Consi-deration	Liberal	90	106.91		1.50	3.82**
	Moderate	75	105.97			
	Conserv.	14	110.79			
	Fundamen.	6	168.67	.05		
	Evangel.	20	116.25			
Type of Home	Natural	162	100.14		.83	1.81
	Foster	12	101.56			
	Blended	49	99.79			
Position	Caregiver	196	103.11		.58	.12
	Paraprof.	11	102.55			
	Profess.	14	102.05			

*Higher score = more severe punishment

**p .01

***Student Newman-Keuls Test for Significance between groups

Table 4

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients

Between Severity of Punishment & Other Variables

(Occurrence, Staff Seriousness, Institution Seriousness)

Misbehaviors	r for occurrence	r for staff	r for institution
Leave grounds	-.12	.54*	.30*
Leave building	.02	.69*	.41*
Excessive noise	.35*	.65*	.14
Stealing	.42*	.64*	.14
Disturbance - vehicles	.37*	.65*	.27*
Disruption - programs	.21*	.55*	.02
Not attending programs	.28*	.65*	.03
Indecent language	.01	.52*	.11
Disrespect - employee	.17**	.44*	.11
Smoking	-.16**	.55*	.39*
Drugs	.10	.48*	.38*
Fighting	.04	.53*	.28*
Defacing property	-.10	.70*	.17**
Gambling	.10	.71*	.31*
Dishonesty	.21*	.60*	.26*
Throwing in building	.27*	.59*	.13
Petting	.13	.73*	.18**

Misbehaviors	r for occurrence	r for staff	r for institution
Loitering - restrooms	.15	.70*	.14
Tardiness to programs	.23*	.66*	.02
Litter on grounds	.12	.73*	.07
Rudeness - residents	.17	.64*	.30*
Losing clothing	.10	.73*	.21*
Leaving program	.01	.65*	-.01
Not completing projects	-.05	.77*	-.10
Not participating	.26*	.64*	-.10
Disobeying	.34*	.58*	.35*
Weapons	.07	.59*	.38*
Disrespect - caregivers	.30*	.62*	.32*
Throwing in rooms	.15	.64*	.13
Inappropriate dressing	.02	.59*	.15
Litter on floor	.24*	.71*	.18**
Attacking employees	.22*	.60*	.45*
Group fights	.26*	.68*	.52*
Body odors	-.04	.27*	-.08
Attacking residents	.22*	.54*	.32*
Extortion	.22*	.63*	.23*
Wetting at night	-.07	.10	-.27*
Wetting during day	-.04	.16**	-.24*
Refusing to speak	.12	.61*	.04

Misbehaviors	r for occurrence	r for staff	r for institution
Homosexual acts	.14	.71*	.29*
Self-injury	.01	.35*	-.23
Masturbation	.12	.64*	.04
Sexual approaches	.00	.68*	.20*
Tantrums	.18**	.63*	-.03

*p .001 **p .01